

courts. They hurt the honest workers and communities of the businesses targeted by the class-action lawyers. The proper place for large interstate class actions to be tried is not in a local court but rather in a Federal court, which are designed—[*applause*]. I look forward to working with both bodies and members of both parties to get good class-action reform out of the Congress this year.

I'll also work with Congress to reform asbestos litigation. Asbestos lawsuits in southern Illinois and elsewhere have led to the bankruptcy of dozens of companies and cost tens of thousands of jobs. Many asbestos claims are filed on behalf of people who are not sick. The volume of asbestos lawsuits is beyond the capacity of our courts to handle, and it is growing. More than 100,000 new asbestos claims were filed last year alone. Congress has begun considering options to improve the current system for handling asbestos lawsuits. They need to act and get the job done. I look forward to signing an asbestos reform in 2005.

I think we're sent to Washington to solve problems, not to pass them on to future Congresses. I believe we are called to do the hard work to make our communities and quality of life a better place. And it's hard work for some in Congress to stand up to the trial lawyers. I understand that. But all we're asking for is fairness. We want our doctors treated fairly. We want the hospitals treated fairly. And most of all, we want the patients and the American people treated fairly.

And I appreciate you all giving me a chance to come by and talk about the vital issue of legal reform. I intend to go back to Washington here shortly, and when I see Members of the Congress as I work this issue, I'm going to say, "I spoke to the good folks of southern Illinois. They understand the problem, and they expect you, Members of the United States Senate and the United States House of Representatives, to get the job done."

Thanks for coming by to say hello. I hope you and your families have a blessed and healthy 2005. May God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:13 p.m. at the Gateway Center. In his remarks, he referred to Tom Cross, minority leader, Illinois House of

Representatives; and Mayor Stan Schaeffer of Collinsville, IL.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Congressional Leaders

January 6, 2005

Class-Action Lawsuit Reform

I am very grateful that Members of the United States Senate and the House of Representatives, Members from both political parties, have come to discuss the need for the Congress and the administration to work together to get meaningful, real class-action lawsuit reform.

Class-action lawsuits have become a problem in the United States. The judicial system is not fair. It is unbalanced. It is tilted. And Members around this table understand that, and Members around this table are willing to set aside their political party to do what is right for worker and businessowner alike.

We had a very good discussion. It's a discussion that says to me that it is very possible that a good piece of legislation can move quickly this year out of both the Senate and the House, get it to conference quickly, and get it to my desk quickly, to show the American people that both parties are willing to work together to solve problems. We have a problem with class-action lawsuits. It is a problem that we all recognize, and it's a problem we intend to fix.

And I want to thank the Members for coming. I'm honored you are here, and I look forward to working with you. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:50 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House.

Message to the Congress Transmitting an Extension of the Russia-United States Mutual Fisheries Agreement

January 6, 2005

To the Congress of the United States:

Consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*), I transmit herewith an Agreement between the Government of

the United States of America and the Government of the Russian Federation extending the Agreement Between the Government of the United States and the Government of the Russian Federation on Mutual Fisheries Relations of May 31, 1999, with annex, as extended (the "Mutual Fisheries Agreement"). The present Agreement, which was affected by an exchange of notes in Moscow on March 3, 2003, and January 30, 2004, extends the Mutual Fisheries Agreement to December 31, 2008.

In light of the importance of our fisheries relationship with the Russian Federation, I urge the Congress to give favorable consideration to this Agreement at an early date.

George W. Bush

The White House,
January 6, 2005.

**Remarks on the Appointment of
Connie Mack as Chairman and John
B. Breaux as Vice Chairman of the
President's Advisory Panel on
Federal Tax Reform and an
Exchange With Reporters**

January 7, 2005

The President. I want to thank the Secretary of the Treasury, John Snow, for being here today. I also want to thank my friend Senator—Senators Connie Mack and John Breaux for agreeing to head a group of citizens who will be exploring ways to simplify the Tax Code. I believe this is an essential task for our country. It's a task that will treat our taxpayers more fairly. A simple code will make it easier on the taxpayers. But it's an important task in order to make sure the economic growth we are seeing in the United States continues forward.

Today we had a very positive set of numbers to—come out to show that more and more Americans are finding work; 159,000 new jobs were added in December, and that doesn't include the revisions from previous months. And that's positive news. And the fundamental question is how can the administration and the Congress continue to make changes so—to keep this economy growing,

to make sure we're the best place in the world to do business.

Today I'm going to Detroit to talk about legal reform. These fine, distinguished citizens will be taking a good, hard look at the Tax Code and coming up with recommendations as to how to make sure the Tax Code encourages economic vitality and growth. It seems like to me the Tax Code today discourages economic vitality and growth when you spend billions of hours filling out the forms. And so I want to thank you all for taking on this important job.

I told the members—the former Senators and members of this committee that I am firm in my desire to get something done. We're going to take their work, and we'll go to the Congress and say, "Let's work together to achieve something very constructive for the American people." And so thanks for taking this on.

Senator Breaux. Glad to do it.

The President. These are distinguished citizens of our country, and I'm proud you're here.

Senator Breaux. Thank you.

Senator Mack. Look forward to doing it.

The President. Yes, you're doing a good job.

Let me answer some questions. Hunt [Terence Hunt, Associated Press].

Iraqi Elections

Q. Mr. President, former National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft had a gloomy assessment about Iraq's elections. He said that they would probably deepen the conflict, increase divisions between the Shiite and Sunni Muslims, and that Iraq would slip into an incipient civil war. Do you share those concerns?

The President. Quite the opposite. I think elections will be such an incredibly hopeful experience for the Iraqi people. Remember, these are people that lived in a society where, if they didn't toe the line of the leadership, they'd be tortured or killed or maimed. And all of a sudden, a new way of life is being introduced into Iraq, a chance for people to express their beliefs and their opinions. I believe democracies can take hold in parts of the world that have been condemned to tyranny. And I believe when democracies take